



BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE

Commercial Services Plan — Newsletter #1



WHAT IS THE COMMERCIAL SERVICES PLAN?

The Commercial Services Plan (CSP) provides the opportunity for establishing the types and levels of commercial activities necessary and/or appropriate for Big Cypress National Preserve. Commercial activities include concession services, museum association sales, and commercial use agreements which allow for “permitted” activity. The CSP is an implementation plan, establishing the most effective and efficient methods for the National Park Service (NPS) to manage those activities. This plan is developed with public input. The CSP must comply with applicable laws and policies and must be consistent with the management philosophies found in the preserve General Management Plan (GMP).

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

In 1998, Congress passed the NPS Concessions Management Improvement Act (PL 105-391), which guides the management of concessions services by the NPS. By law (36 CFR 5.3), all commercial activities that occur within a unit of the National Park System must be formally authorized. The Concession Management Improvement (CMI) Act provides for commercial development and services at NPS units when they are both necessary and appropriate to the parks.

Big Cypress National Preserve currently has no commercial services management program. A uniform policy consistent with the Act will be developed in this planning effort to implement this opportunity. Current contracts and permits authorizing commercial services either have, or soon will expire. A commercial services plan is an essential step in reviewing existing commercial services to ensure they are still necessary and

appropriate. The plan will also consider new services and/or improvements to existing services to achieve the desired future commercial services goals of the preserve.

HOW COULD THE PLAN AFFECT ME?

The mission of the National Park Service is to preserve and protect nationally significant resources while providing for visitor use and enjoyment of the parks. Existing commercial services will be analyzed to ensure they are not causing unacceptable impacts to preserve resources. Resource protection measures could result in changes to how commercial services are conducted or provided.

The plan will examine ways to partner with commercial operators who would provide additional services and information in a way that compliments the NPS staff so that opportunities to improve visitor experiences are enhanced.

Resource preservation is a defining goal for the National Park Service. A careful review and study of carrying capacity will determine how acceptable commercial service opportunities related to outdoor activities, such as guide services, will be conducted while protecting the natural resources.

Visitor safety is also an important goal for the National Park Service. Existing and potentially new commercial services will be analyzed to ensure visitors enjoy the safest experience possible, when services are conducted and provided.

Analysis could indicate that new services, through new business opportunities, might be warranted in areas of the preserve that are currently without any commercial services.

Some areas have basic commercial services. An analysis will support either that the range and quality of services are appropriate or that opportunities for expansion or enhancement, including year-round opportunities exist.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?

The National Park Service has established a planning team consisting of the preserve Superintendent, senior management staff, and Washington Office concession planners. They have established a decision-making framework for the plan based on the preserve's legislated mandate, mission, and goals. The framework will lead managers through complex deliberations on providing appropriate commercial services while managing and protecting sensitive resources. The framework is presented in this newsletter to assist the public in identifying the boundaries of this planning effort.

The planning team is currently reviewing existing commercial services and facilities, identifying issues and problems, and developing commercial services goals for each area in Big Cypress National Preserve. Public input on existing conditions, issues, and goals is being solicited through this newsletter and public open houses.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The public is invited to comment on and/or provide input to the planning framework presented in this newsletter. This is a crucial and important step in the planning process, and it establishes the basis for the plan. Alternatives considered and decisions made must comply with the criteria developed in the framework. The National Park Service must comply with the laws that established the preserve and other applicable laws. The commercial services goals for the preserve are flexible and should be redefined periodically to reflect current conditions in the preserve and surrounding communities. Just a reminder, however – all elements must comply with the laws and mandates that govern the preserve.

The National Park Service uses a “Goal Driven” planning process. Essentially we determine where we are now, where do we want to be, and how do we get there. To be approved, a goal must demonstrate how we get to where we want to be in the future. That is why goal development at this step in the process is so important.

After the framework is developed with public input, alternatives will be developed and an impact analysis conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. A draft plan will be released for public review and comment. Following revisions of the draft plan based on public comments, a final plan will be published. A schedule of the entire process and opportunities for public participation is included in this newsletter.

HOW CAN YOU BECOME INVOLVED?

You can help the National Park Service by getting involved early in the process.

Your input at this time will help develop a plan that is responsive to the needs and desires of the visiting public, local communities, the local business community, and preserve management.

Commercial Services Plan Process and Schedule

STEP	ACTIVITY	PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES
1 <u>We are Here</u>	Project Scoping – Planning framework (laws, mandates, mission, goals, issues) developed. (Winter 2005 - 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Read newsletter and send in your comments ■ Attend public open house
2	Develop and Evaluate Alternatives – Develop a reasonable range of alternatives consistent with planning framework. The potential consequences of each alternative will be evaluated. (Spring 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Read newsletter and send in your comments ■ View planning status, documents, and provide comments on the PEPC website
3	Prepare and Publish Draft Commercial Services Plan/Environmental Assessment -- The draft plan will describe the planning issues, management alternatives (including a preferred), and impacts. (Spring/Summer 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Read draft plan and send us your comments ■ Participate in public meetings ■ View planning status, documents, and provide comments on the PEPC website
4	Document Decisions and Publish Final Plan – The draft plan will be revised based on public comments, further analysis, and additional information. A final plan will be distributed. (Fall 2006)	
5	Implementation – Implementation of the plan will begin. (Winter 2006)	

You are encouraged to review this document to better understand the planning framework and to offer comments on the direction of the plan. To make this process work, and to ensure that the public's views and concerns are addressed, we need your comments, feedback and participation in the upcoming scoping meeting.

You can also send us your comments and/or suggestions via e-mail, through our web-based planning process, regular mail, or dropping them off at the Oasis Visitor Center or preserve Headquarters in Ochopee.

The park address is:

Big Cypress National Preserve
33100 Tamiami Trail, East
Ochopee, Florida 34141

The e-mail address is:

BICY_superintendent @nps.gov

The web-based Planning, Environmental and Public Comment (PEPC) process is available at www.parkplanning.nps.gov/bicy

You can also join our mailing list to receive future newsletters and relevant information providing updates on the planning process.

BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE

COMMERCIAL SERVICES PLAN — PLANNING FRAMEWORK

PARK PURPOSE — Why Does The Park Exist?

Public Law 93-440 established the Big Cypress National Preserve in 1974 for the purpose of ensuring, “...the preservation, conservation and protection of the natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreational values of the Big Cypress Watershed in the State of Florida and to provide for the enhancement of public enjoyment thereof...” The following activities are regulated in the preserve by the National Park Service in accordance with Public Law 93-440.

- ▶ Motorized vehicles (off-road vehicle use)
- ▶ Exploration and extraction of oil, gas, and other minerals
- ▶ Grazing
- ▶ Draining or construction of works which alter natural water courses
- ▶ Agriculture
- ▶ Hunting, fishing, and trapping
- ▶ New Construction
- ▶ Traditional land use by the Miccosukee & Seminole Tribes

Public Law 100-301 expanded the Big Cypress National Preserve’s boundary in 1988 to include 147,280 acres (the Addition) of adjacent lands. The primary purposes of this Addition Act, as defined in Section 2 of Public Law 100-301 were to limit development pressure on lands bordering the preserve, to enhance the protection of Everglades National Park while providing recreational opportunities and other public uses, as appropriate.

Photo Courtesy of Niki Butcher



PARK SIGNIFICANCE – Why Is The Park Special?

Although Everglades National Park was not specifically mentioned in the enabling legislation, a review of House and Senate Reports (Senate Report 93-1128 and House Report 93-1/4502 identifies the water flow from the preserve as essential to the survival of its neighbor and the entire south Florida ecosystem. The Addition Act restates the intent of Public Law 93-440, in that the preserve was established to protect a fragile water-dominated environment, which is a component of the Everglades ecosystem.

There are over 400 known archaeological sites within the preserve, which represent historic and pre-historic Native American activities. In addition, there are several contemporary ceremonial sites used on a routine basis by members of the Miccosukee and Seminole tribes. Cultural use of some natural resources occurs in exercising Native American rights. Other potential historical and cultural resources occur within the preserve boundary.

Members of the Miccosukee and Seminole Tribes of Indians reside in the preserve on either individual sites or in a series of small villages. Areas have also been set aside for religious ceremonies in both the original preserve boundary and in the Addition Area for Tribal purposes. The legislation establishing the preserve authorizes Tribal members' customary use and occupancy, rights subject to reasonable regulations. The enabling legislation also requires that the Tribes be offered the Right of First Refusal on all new revenue producing visitor services authorized by the preserve.

Big Cypress National Preserve visitors participate in a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreational activities, including camping, hunting, hiking, canoeing, wildlife observation, photography, fishing, sightseeing, bicycling, and picnicking. Camping occurs in both frontcountry and backcountry sites. Walk-in hunting particularly occurs in the Loop Unit and Deep Lake Unit. Backcountry visitors would include private property owners, who access their property by crossing preserve lands.



NPS Photo by Charles Lackemacher

MISSION GOALS –

What Are We Planning For?

Consistent with the mission of the National Park Service, the Commercial Services Plan will seek to enhance the following goals:

- ▶ That the natural and cultural resources and associated values are protected, restored, and maintained in good condition and managed within their broader ecosystems and cultural contexts.
- ▶ That the NPS contributes to knowledge about natural and cultural resources and associated values, and that management decisions about resources and visitors are based on adequate scholarly and scientific information.
- ▶ That visitors understand, appreciate, and are inspired by the park's historical and natural resources, and that they support the protection of these resources.
- ▶ That available preserve facilities, infrastructure, and services are sufficient to support operational needs, park staff, and visitors.
- ▶ Insure that commercial service providers implement “green”, sustainable activities (sustainable technology to the extent possible and environmentally responsible)
- ▶ All visitors are aware of being in a unit of the National Park Service (identity)
- ▶ A high level of quality exists for all commercial services provided (enjoyable, comfortable, and accurate)
- ▶ All visitors to the preserve have the opportunity to experience the preserve in some way, even if they don't have “specialized” motorized or on-motorized equipment to allow it (access to Backcountry specifically)
- ▶ The preserve has the staff, funding and management tools to allow safe, efficient and effective management of the commercial services program, and is able to manage the impact of all commercial activity in the preserve. (This includes Cost Recovery, Life Cycle Costing, Phasing of projects)
- ▶ Partnerships to provide compatible commercial recreational activities and services that enhance visitor experience are used to the maximum degree possible.

Commercial Services Goals

During initial internal scoping, a significant amount of time was spent considering where the preserve would like to be in 10-15 years with regard to commercial services. The team developed 10 goals, which we believe address issues regarding commercial services. The following goals are specific to commercial services:

- ▶ Commercial service access is available from a central location (multiple services from one location) or from strategically located pods/locations (dispersed areas offering multiple services at each location)
- ▶ All interpretive information given to visitors is accurate.
- ▶ All commercial activities are compatible with the natural and cultural resources of the preserve.
- ▶ All commercial activities are compatible with the enabling legislation and authorized uses of the preserve.

ISSUES

The following list of issues could have some impact on how commercial services are planned and managed. In order to achieve the stated goals, these issues should be addressed. Most goals can be categorized as addressing Resource Protection; Laws, Regulations, and Policy; Cultural Sensitivities; Interpretation; Visitor experience; NPS operations; Partnerships.

The following is a preliminary list of issues developed by the planning team:

- ▶ **Resource Protection** — Insure the integrity of Soils, Hydrology, Wetlands, Threatened & Endangered species, vegetation, air quality, noise, State & Federal designations. Limited disturbed sites exist for commercial operations – which may highlight wetland issues for new development, front country infrastructure, resulting in a high dollar investment.
- ▶ **Laws and Regulations, and Policy** — Enabling Legislation, Clean water Act, Endangered Species Act, Land Protection Plan must be considered as commercial services planning moves forward. Hunting is allowed in the preserve under State of Florida hunting regulations. Oil & Gas Rights may cause road capacity and use conflicts. Jurisdiction over roads, private land, private airstrips must be addressed.
- ▶ **Cultural Sensitivities** — The Miccosukee and Seminole Tribes of Indians enjoy traditional and customary use and occupancy rights within the preserve, which must be considered in development and implementation of a commercial services plan.
- ▶ **Interpretation** — Are all opportunities to enhance visitor education and appreciation being met? To enhance existing staffing, the NPS has the opportunity to work in partnership with commercial operators by providing interpretive training for commercial operators who have

contact with visitors. Training must ensure consistency of the messages being delivered to visitors.

- ▶ **Visitor Experience** — Inherently low Carrying Capacity due to nature of resources – will need to be accommodated with facilities (improved trails, etc). Seasonal closures and areas designated for specific uses may be needed to reduce conflicts between uses and with resource management and protection. Can commercial operations be better coordinated to provide a better range of services for all visitors? Safety must be emphasized in all activities. Seasonal and environmental constraints exist (heat, bugs, etc) that need to be considered in development of all activities - Quality of visitor experience will directly correlate to education regarding environment.
- ▶ **NPS Operations** — Commercial Services management is currently a collateral duty for park staff and commercial services will impact other divisions from increased use – maintenance, rangers, interpretation etc. Operational issues exist with management activities (fire, trail maintenance, etc) conflicting with activity and perception of safety by visitors (Rx burns, recovery of broken down equipment). Safety (OSHA) requirements/ operational concerns due to specialized equipment will need to be addressed (possibly with special operator training). Challenges exist with maintaining current facilities. Minimal Backcountry infrastructure exists to serve as a “destination”.
- ▶ **Partnerships** — The preserve is surrounded by public lands, with opportunities for partnerships to be formed in order to provide commercial opportunities. There is a large private property base with rights that need to be respected and commercial services shouldn't impact private property, nor diminish private property owners' experiences. Competing services and facilities exist outside the preserve. Those inside the boundary must be “Necessary & Appropriate.”

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Cypress National Preserve
Ochopee, FL



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